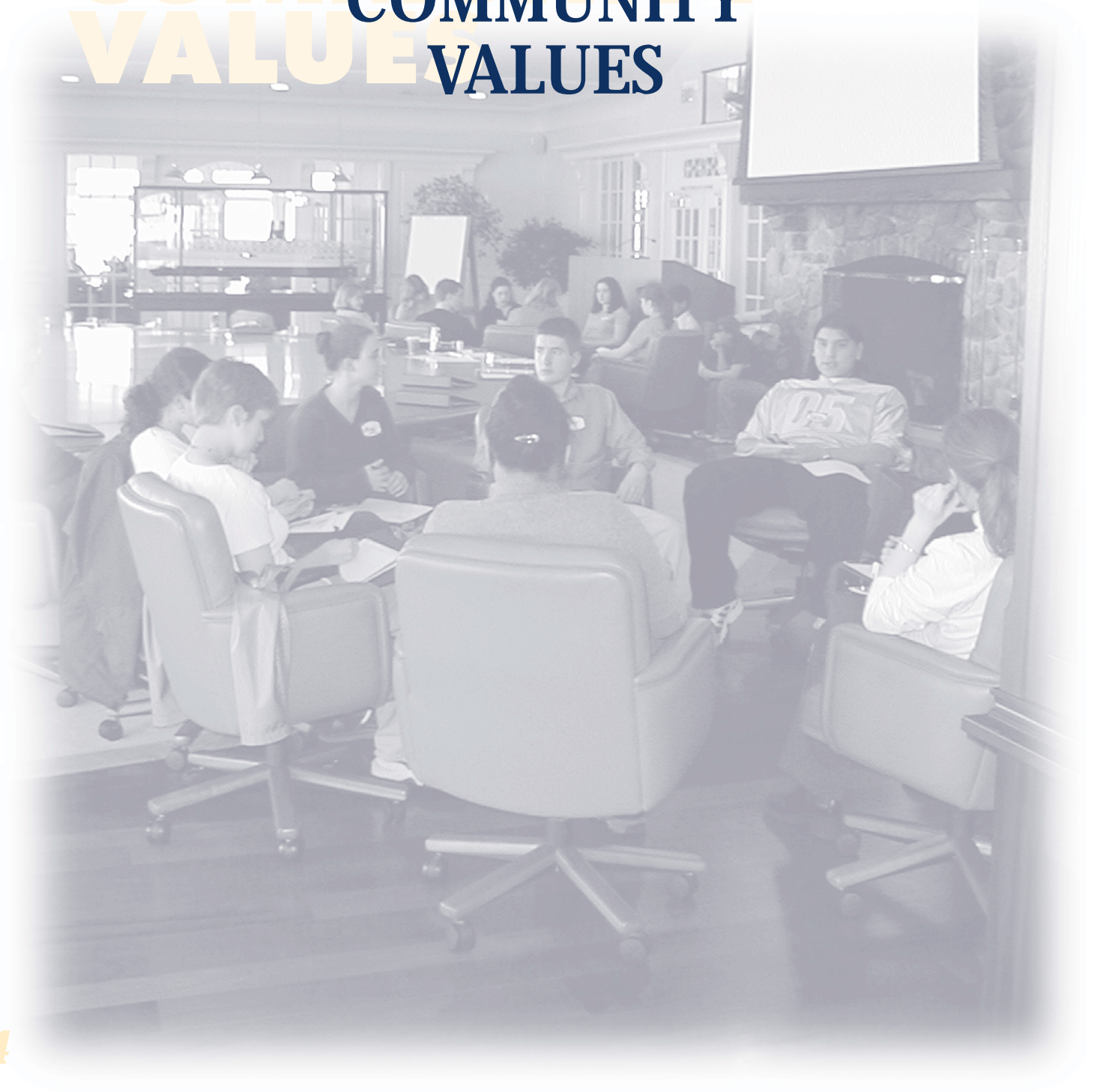




CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNITY VALUES



COMMUNITY VALUES

The community is the source of the values that govern ethical and responsible student behavior. “Community” includes all citizens of the towns that use the local schools. We all want our children to function ethically, responsibly and successfully in the complex world we share. The issue for educators and parents then becomes: What is the most effective way to instill a sense of right and wrong in our children? It is essential that communities come together to identify those values that matter to them, and then translate those values into standards of behavior for students and all those connected to the education of our children. But can we, as a community, agree on common values and standards of behavior? How do we agree without choosing some person’s or group’s values over those of others?

The question, “Whose values will you teach?”, often is posed when the issue of teaching values arises. Each community should answer, “Ours.” The assumption underlying such an answer is that common values can be identified and embraced by a community; it is not difficult, in fact, to identify core values common to us all. The problem is that we often confuse values or ethics with specific political ideologies or religious convictions. Each of us may have personal convictions or standards of behavior taught to us by our parents, family or church, but it would be inappropriate to assume these convictions are the common standard. In order to develop common core values, we must both hold to individual convictions and demonstrate respect for differences. In fact, common core values should embrace respect by refraining from judgment about others’ lifestyles and beliefs. Values and ethical standards are broader than individual or group perspectives on specific political or religious issues or lifestyles.

Core values, such as honesty and compassion, have repeatedly been found to transcend political ideologies, religious convictions, and cultural dif-

ferences. Our core values are those attributes that are so fundamental to civility that none of us would wish to live in a society that lacked them. Rushworth Kidder summarizes his research on this point in his book, *Shared Values for a Troubled World*. Through a compilation of interviews with a globally diverse group of men and women, Kidder discovers that there are, in effect, a set of eight universally-held core values: love, truthfulness, fairness, freedom, unity, tolerance, responsibility, and respect for life. This moral common ground, or universal code, is nearly identical to the lists of values developed separately by numerous groups Kidder has worked with all around the United States.

Because core, universal values do exist that define expectations for civil behavior in a community, the critical question becomes, what kind of deliberative, inclusive process will the community use to identify, define, and put values into action? Without an inclusive process, the choice of values risks seeming arbitrary or unrepresentative. The process not only provides legitimacy, it also invests members of the community with an understanding and commitment to the core values they identify collectively.

“A community’s functioning rests on trust, and trust comes from the understanding that emerges from dialogue.”
-Sizer and Sizer (1999: 17)

We provide an outline of core values that the Commission has identified as fundamental; however, we strongly urge each school district and community not to bypass or shortcut the process of defining its own core values. By engaging in a process that is inclusive, students, school staff, and community members will develop a sense of ownership with respect to local codes of conduct. The result will be communities, schools, and students that are empowered to enforce the code, and are committed to practicing it.

COMMUNITY VALUES

"The purpose of ... public engagement... is to channel a community's concern, apathy, or anger into informed, constructive action."

-Annenberg Institute (7)

The need for a process of inclusive community involvement does not end with the identified core values. Even in a community with consensus around the core values, there may be dis-

agreement about the choice of strategies and tactics for achieving the values. Community acceptance and endorsement of these strategies, tactics and activities, like the identification of the values, will require deliberation, inclusion, communication, and respectful compromise. The identification of core values as the desired ends establishes the context within which the subsequent deliberations and respectful compromises about methods take place.



A PROCESS FOR COMMUNITY VALUE IDENTIFICATION

A Process for Community Value Identification

KEY FEATURES OF THE PROCESS

- The process is inclusive of all community stakeholders.
- The process is deliberative and cooperative, not oppositional.

GOALS OF THE PROCESS

- To identify shared community values;
- To define values in operational and behavioral dimensions; and
- To put values into action through agreed-upon strategies and tactics.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Objectively identify community members. Differences in lifestyles or politics are not a justification for exclusion from this process.
2. Convene a diverse and representative group of community members to discuss and identify community values and expectations for behavior.
3. Ask community members to imagine that the task is to choose a certain number of values to be engraved above the main entries of all local schools, as the values the community wants for itself and the schools' students.
4. As a large group, brainstorm as many values or qualities as possible that describe what it means to be a good person. Include everybody's ideas.
5. Ask each person to write a list of no more than eight values that he or she believes to be the most important. Ideally, these values would be distinct from each other and would represent only those qualities essential to being an ethical human being.
6. Divide into small groups where individuals can share their lists and collectively narrow the choices down to one list of no more than eight values that everyone agrees to.
7. Reconvene the large group and have each smaller group post its list on a wall. As a large group, work together until a single list has been agreed to. Remember, space over the entrance is limited, so the final list should have only 5 to 8 words. You will find that many of the values overlap and can be consolidated.
8. When a final list has been agreed on, develop and agree to several behavioral indicators as standards for each value. For example, how does an honest person behave? How does a respectful person behave?
9. Identify potential outcomes that will result from consistently engaging in the behaviors just discussed. In other words, what are hallmarks of how an ethical and responsible school looks and feels—to students, to teachers, to parents, to the community?
10. Develop a community or school action plan. Discuss ways to share the recommendations with others and to put the values into action. In other words, what will we adopt to achieve our goals: at home? at school? and in the community?

PORTRAITS OF TWO COMMUNITIES ENGAGING IN A PROCESS OF VALUE IDENTIFICATION

- Fort Fairfield had wanted to work on character education since 1994. When UNUM agreed to support such an initiative, they were the first to sign onto the project. Community members and teachers each attended a one-day facilitated seminar. A follow-up session for teachers was held in September 1996. A total of twenty community members and twenty teachers took part in the program. Both groups agreed on the following list of core values: honesty, responsibility, respect, compassion, justice, and cooperation. One lead teacher was identified in the elementary school and one in the high school. These two teachers continue to lead the values work in the schools to this day.
- The Orono community first got excited about character education after hearing an evening presentation by Dr. Rushworth Kidder. Following that evening, the community asked the Institute for Global Ethics to engage three groups in the process: a group of community members, the class of 1998, and all middle school teachers. With the advent of the UNUM-funded project, another group of twenty participants engaged in the process, as did all forty high school teachers. Common values selected on all five lists included respect and responsibility. Honesty was on four lists. Fairness, caring, and tolerance were common to three lists. Since that time, the values process and ethical decision-making framework have been integrated into the ninth grade curriculum and into Orono's service learning program.